

boners and all

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boners and all

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Summary

When Hannibal feeds Will the ortolans drowned in Armagnac and flavored with caviar, the last thing he expects is for Will to react by transforming into a merman at the dinner table.

“You see,” Will says as he claws his way across the table towards Hannibal, “caviar might be known as an aphrodisiac to humans, but it has other side effects in my kind. Potent side effects.”

Notes

This is my fic for MerMay. It is also a gift for Victorine <3 Enjoy, Vic!

Title is from the infamous "bones and all?" line from the Ko No Mono episode. And yes, I am once again stealing my own magic system from my MerMay series. Also minor inspirations from the amazing [Reflets dans l'eau](#) by DarkmoonSigel, pleaseeeeeee go read it. And also referencing the khaleesi heart scene from Game of Thrones.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

After settling Will with a sharp knife and an ample amount of ginger, Hannibal turns away. It is deliberate, in a way, for it is yet another test to see if Will might take the easy way out and stab him in the back. He knows that Will is still undecided in whether to continue being Jack's teacup or Hannibal's chrysalis, and tonight might be the night that the pendulum swings in a direction away from Hannibal. After all, Randall had attacked Will, so Will had seen that killing as justified. Miss Lounds, on the other hand – she had been annoying and ill-mannered, but for Will, those had not crossed the line into being crimes.

Not that Hannibal minds. Her rudeness had long ago earned her a spot on Hannibal's dinner table.

However, it is not just to tempt Will that he turns away. Like everything he does, his action has another reason, as the particular dish he wishes to serve must be retrieved from its storage place.

Hannibal had known from the first time that he presented Will with food that he would one day want to serve him an ortolan bunting. Will had reacted so eagerly to Hannibal's protein scramble – such a simple fare, easily prepared, hardly a gourmet dish even if Hannibal had taken his usual pains to elevate the dish, and yet Will had shoveled it in his mouth like it was the finest food he'd ever eaten. And, to be fair, at the time it probably had been. But it had sparked in Hannibal a driving curiosity about how Will might reach to a more gourmet delicacy, much as seeing Will slip into the mind of the Minnesota Shrike had lit a curiosity in Hannibal to see how Will might react to the Ripper.

Will had surprised Hannibal, then. He hopes the pattern will continue now.

Will is still dutifully slicing ginger when Hannibal returns with his prize. He raises an eyebrow, but does not stop working. He asks, "What is that?"

"A surprise," Hannibal tells him.

Another eyebrow joins the first. "Am I going to like the surprise?"

"I very much hope so," Hannibal says sincerely.

Will tilts his head. He's no longer holding back, hiding between his glasses and closing his eyes against the shadows. Hannibal can almost feel the way he absorbs Hannibal's words – his tone, his cadence, his body language. And he can see the exact moment Will decides that the whatever the surprise is, it is not a threat.

Or if it is a threat, that he'll deal with it later, especially now that he knows where Hannibal keeps his knives.

"How much more ginger do you need?" Will asks.

Hannibal drifts closer. To anyone else, he might be rudely close; to Will, he is accepted with nary a blink. And Hannibal is used to people being calm about him being close. He is a well-respected member of society, a doctor, a patron of the arts. But it's one thing to touch

shoulders with his fellow patrons at the opera, who know nothing of his design, and quite another to touch shoulders with Will, who not only knows of his design but sees every detail of it in a way so few can.

“That is enough,” Hannibal says, for a quick glance tells him that Will has been both efficient and effective. “Thank you; it is so rare that I find a guest who is willing to participate in the making of their meal.”

Will lays down the knife. The movement is careful and precise, as one lays down a weapon before a police officer. He says, “I doubt that. I imagine many a guest would be willing to pay quite a bit to be allowed into the inner sanctum before a Hannibal Lecter feast.”

“No payment is ever necessary for a seat at my table. My feasts are for my friends. We do not collect dues from our friends.”

“Nor do we send huntsman after them to collect a price,” Will notes, and his tone is light but full of meaning.

And Hannibal had thought Will had moved past it, but then again, Will’s pendulum is still swinging. Perhaps, in this moment, with the reminder of Hannibal’s feasts – and who his feasts are made of – Will feels closer to dear old Jack.

He rolls up his sleeves. Ostensibly to begin the meal preparation, of course, although it also serves the purpose of baring the scars Will’s huntsman had carved into Hannibal’s arms.

“A toll asked and a toll paid,” Hannibal says mildly. “For both of us.”

Will is silent for a moment. Then he dips his head in agreement. “Even Steven,” he murmurs.

They are the same words he had said the night he had brought Randall Tier to Hannibal. A lesser man might have seen it as proof of a hunting dog being finally mastered, bringing its kill back to its owner, but Hannibal had known the truth. It had been both a promise and a request.

A promise: that Will was no longer keeping his hands bound by the pesky rules of morality he had when Hannibal had first met him.

A request: that Hannibal consider this particular phase of their dance concluded.

As he had then, Hannibal nods. “Even Steven,” he echoes. The words are unfamiliar and clumsy on his tongue. They are of Will’s language – simple and blunt. Hannibal is used to a finer, subtler vintage.

And tonight, he shall introduce a new one to Will.

“I shall finish the preparation,” Hannibal announces. “You may take a seat at the table. The settings have already been laid out.”

Will’s lips quirk up. “That confident of my company, Dr. Lecter?”

“I am always prepared for company. It is the mark of a good host. And I would be a very poor host indeed if I kept my guest on his feet for the rest of the meal preparation.” Hannibal inclines his head to the doorway. “If you would please?”

Will does not move. “Perhaps I might prefer to be on my feet. I don’t exactly live the, ah, sedentary lifestyle your typical company does.”

It could be the truth. Will does spend a lot of his time on his feet – lecturing at the FBI Academy, running off to crime scenes whenever Jack beckons, tending to the large pack of dogs he keeps. However, it could also conceal a secondary motive, like Will wanting to keep an eye on him so that he can report back to Jack with all the details.

That would be what Hannibal would do. And Will is so very good at mirroring others.

“If your desire to stay is because you feel you have not contributed enough to the meal, then I assure you, your gift of pork is more than enough. On the other hand, if your desire to stay is rooted in a desire to observe, then I would point you towards the stools over there.”

Will gives him a baffled look. It’s not so dissimilar from when Hannibal had first denounced his terrible subpar cologne.

Hannibal adds, “I was not being facetious about treating a guest properly.”

“Didn’t see you as one for bar stools.”

“They serve their purpose,” Hannibal says, and then he moves to go fetch the needed brandy. When he returns, Will is perched on one of the bar stools, hands folded neatly in front of him and back straight like a student awaiting their teacher’s return. He does not seem guilty, though, nor does he have the air of someone who has hastily assumed a pose after sneaking around.

Perhaps the pendulum is swinging in Hannibal’s direction. He smiles at the thought.

“That looks expensive,” Will observes.

“It is Armagnac. A type of brandy from the Armagnac region of the southwest of France, traditionally made in column stills before being aged in oak barrels.”

“So . . . definitely expensive.”

“Are we not at an age where we should enjoy the finer things in life?”

“There’s enjoying and then there’s overindulging,” Will says. “And I do have to drive home eventually, you know.”

The Armagnac is not actually for them to drink. Hannibal could easily put his mind to rest by telling him as such.

He says, “My responsibilities as a host include ensuring that my guests have a place to stay, should they need it. It would be rude to simply evict them into the cold.”

“Tempting,” Will says, and Hannibal can’t tell if he means it or not. “But I have my dogs.”

Hannibal firmly tells himself that he cannot be jealous of a pack of furry mutts. He breathes in and then out, calming himself. The dish he wishes to serve requires the utmost of steady hands for preparation, and he has no extras if he makes a mistake. He’s never ordered extras. After all, he has never needed them.

“The offer is open should you change your mind,” he tells Will instead, before he opens the Armagnac and begins to empty it into the bowl he’s chosen. As it flows, he adds his other ingredients. He has the recipe, of course, for he had made it a goal to learn how to make the dish after he had first tasted it. But once he had mastered it, he had begun to make his own adjustments and modifications, and he intends to apply all of that experimentation to serve Will the perfect and flavorful experience.

“ . . . That’s a lot of stuff,” Will says. “And you – you’re not using a recipe?”

“Oh, I am. One of my own design. One which I think will be perfectly suited for you and me,” Hannibal answers calmly. “You will enjoy it, I assure you.”

“If you say so,” Will says doubtfully.

“You will.”

Will doesn’t lean back when Hannibal brings out the still flaming roasting pan, but he can tell Will wants to. In Will’s defense, in all of his prior meals with Hannibal, his courses have been brought out fully plated, and more importantly, never on fire. So Hannibal cannot blame Will’s instinctive reaction of wanting to move away.

It still stings a little, though. Surely, Will should know that Hannibal would never be so crass as to cause him injury with *food*.

“Ortolan bunting,” Hannibal announces, and he is gratified when Will leans in. A minute movement, but for Will, it is as loud as though he had moved his entire chair. “Among gourmands, the ortolan bunting is considered a rare but debauched delicacy. A rite of passage, if you will. Preparation calls for the songbird to be drowned alive in Armagnac. It is then roasted and consumed whole in a single mouthful.”

Will peers at the birds. He seems more relaxed now that Hannibal has outlined what is in front of him, and what is expected of him.

And then Will comments, “Ortolans are endangered.”

Hannibal allows himself a small smile. Trust Will to recognize the illegality the dish poses rather than the dish contents itself. It is the response of a law enforcement officer, not a food connoisseur.

“Who among us is not?”

Will's eyes snap up. Clearly, Hannibal's use of the plural term has not been missed. And equally clearly, he disagrees with being grouped in with Hannibal, even though it had been he, and not Hannibal, who had furnished the meat for their main course.

But then Will visibly relaxes. Unfortunately, Hannibal can tell that it is because he is forcing himself to relax, not because he is accepting what has been said. There's still a hint of tension in his jaw, a spark of fire in his eyes, a slight crimp to where his fingers are laying on the table. His relaxation is merely a portrait that he paints for Hannibal because he thinks that is what Hannibal wants.

It's like tasting artificial vanilla as opposed to real vanilla. For most people, it might be enough. For Hannibal . . . well, he's always had high standards.

"I haven't been gorged, drowned, plucked, and roasted," Will comments, the lightness of his voice in contrast to the emotions in his eyes. He hadn't said anything when Hannibal had drowned or plucked the ortolans, but evidently, the process had left an impression. "Not yet."

Hannibal pauses. How like Will, to swing back and forth. To object with being grouped with Hannibal on moment, and then to compare himself with Hannibal in the next. Or perhaps he objects to Hannibal being the one making the association. Perhaps he feels he ought to be making the call. It would make sense; Will's empathy is so strong that he has always longed for a clear path forward that he knows he chose to walk, not one clouded by the memories of all the other voices in his head.

Well, if it is a clear path forward he wants, Hannibal is happy to provide it.

"Traditionally," Hannibal says, picking up one of the ortolans, "during this meal, we are to place shrouds over our heads, hiding our faces from God." He raises his eyes and looks directly at Will. "I don't hide from God."

Will understands the message, if the way his lips tighten is any indication. That, or he's remembering their discussion about God.

Just like he had then, Will chooses not to challenge God. He instead breaks their gaze and looks to the roasting pan. Carefully, he delicately picks up the remaining ortolan and lifts it to mouth level.

"Bones and all?" he asks.

"Bones and all," Hannibal confirms.

Hannibal waits just long enough to see the ortolan descend into Will's open mouth before he focuses on his own portion. The ortolan is still warm from the roasting, still drenched in the scents of the Armagnac Hannibal had marinated it in, and still utterly divine when Hannibal swallows it. The mouthful – and it is a mouthful, for the bird is small and delicate enough that Hannibal doesn't need to chew at all – is over in a moment.

And yet, what a moment it is.

From the look on Will's face – eyes closed, body still, face tilted upwards as though receiving revelation – he agrees.

Hannibal politely lets him have his moment. After all, he can remember being much the same after he had experienced his first ortolan. So he waits until Will has opened his eyes again before he speaks.

“After my first ortolan, I was euphoric.”

Will's tongue darts out and swipes over his lips. A flash of pink, like a bird darting out from the brush. “Euphoric,” he echoes softly. “That's an . . . interesting choice of word.”

“Can you think of a more fitting word for a stimulating reminder of our power over life and death?”

“So when I killed Freddie Lounds,” Will says, “would you say I was euphoric?”

It is the first time he has openly acknowledged what he did to Freddie Lounds. Not metaphors, no implications, no hints. Hannibal feels a rush of elation, a sweetness that tastes even better than the ortolan he so carefully prepared. Will is beginning to accept that he no longer needs the shroud.

“Tell me, did your heart race when you murdered her?”

“No,” Will says. He then frowns and rubs at his chest. For a moment, Hannibal thinks that he is about to change his mind and reveal that he lied, but then Will mutters, “Sure is racing now though.”

“A low heart rate is a true indicator of one's capacity for violence. Your choices affect the physical structures of your brain.”

Will makes a soft sound. His tongue moves in his mouth again, over and around his teeth, as if his gums are tingling from the ortolan. Hannibal runs over the list of ingredients, but even as he does, he's read Will's medical chart – he knows that Will has no allergies and therefore would not have reacted to anything. It might be that he is chasing the flavor, but his behavior seems odd for that. Usually, most people would just lick their lips, not their teeth.

Then again: they are not most people, are they?

“Physical structures,” Will says, running his tongue over his teeth again. “You mean that you think that killing . . . is changing me.”

“Yes,” Hannibal says, because it is the truth. “You must understand that blood and breath are only elements undergoing change to fuel your radiance. Just as the source of light is burning.”

As he utters the last sentence, Will's hand flies up to his throat. He clutches at it like it's swelling shut, eyes wide and startled, his breath coming fast and short. He scrabbles at his neck, almost as if he is looking for something.

“Will?”

“The source of light,” Will says, and his words make no sense to Hannibal. “You never choose words carelessly – my source, my light, my *Song* – I cannot burn my *Song* – ”

Hannibal frowns. Will might not always have recognized when Hannibal was making a joke, but he’s never so misunderstood Hannibal’s words before. The frantic nature of his words coupled with the way he’s clearly panicking is not at all what Hannibal wants to see.

Perhaps eating the ortolan was a step too far. Perhaps the pendulum has swung firmly back to Jack. Perhaps this will be the end of Will’s chrysalis.

“Will – ”

“What the hell did you put in that Armagnac?” Will barks.

It is a tone that demands immediate obedience. Hannibal chafes under it.

“I assure you, Will, nothing that would harm you.” And then, when Will does not seem mollified, he adds, “If I wanted to kill you, I would not use poison. I would use my hands. Just as you would.”

“You’re about to feel my hands if you don’t tell me what you put in that Armagnac,” Will snarls. One hand is still at his throat; the other is at the table, fingers clawed against the table surface, as if he wishes to gouge marks into it. “*Tell me.*”

Hannibal does. As he lists off the flavors he added, Will’s eyes get narrower and narrower, until at least he mentions the final item: caviar.

Will hisses. It’s the only way Hannibal can describe it. A sibilant sound, like a sea serpent poised to strike. And Hannibal is not prey, but for a moment, his heartrate rises like he is.

“*Caviar*; had to pick caviar?”

It is not a question, not truly. Hannibal answers anyways, since Will seems on the verge of an outburst.

“Yes. It was the most suitable for the flavor profile I was looking for.”

“Well, you’re right about it being most suitable. Just not for what you wanted,” Will says. He finally takes his hand away from his throat and –

And there is a bright light at the base of his throat. It glitters and gleams like a diamond, silver and white and utterly stunning. Hannibal is so caught up in staring at it that he misses when Will stands and leans forward.

He doesn’t miss when Will heaves himself onto the table, though.

“Will – ”

“You see,” Will says, too casual and too cool, a perfect mimicry of Hannibal when he had introduced the dish, as he claws his way across the table towards Hannibal, “caviar might be known as an aphrodisiac to humans, but it has other side effects in my kind. Potent side effects.”

It is Hannibal’s turn to lean back. “Your kind?”

“Yes, my kind. What? Did you think humans were the only species on this planet?”

Hannibal eyes Will – eyes the sharpening fangs that have now descended from Will’s jaws and gleam pointedly with every word he speaks; eyes the claws that now tip Will’s fingers and are leaving deep gouge marks in the surface of his mahogany table; eyes the glittering, glowing diamond at the base of his throat, too bright to look away. His brain tells him that his eyes are seeing true, and yet he can’t quite believe it.

“And your kind is?” he musters enough voice to ask.

Will smiles at him as he reaches Hannibal’s side of the table. It is a smile full of teeth and fangs, promising pain and threatening death.

“Why,” he purrs, “the hunters of the sea.”

As he speaks, his clothes split. The buttons fly off his shirt as the cloth rips open; the pants rip open at the seams. With one casual swipe of his now clawed hand, Will pushes aside the shreds of fabric, and when he twists to support himself on his other hand, Hannibal catches sight of something even more impossible than the diamond at Will’s throat.

A tail.

A long, muscular, singular *tail*. Blue and green and purple, scales running down the length of it with fins on the sides and ends, capped with wicked looking spikes. As Will inhales, small rivulets of silver brighten and dim all down his tail, like streams of living precious metal.

“Tell me,” Will says, his voice still a soft and deadly purr, and somehow his hand is now wrapped around Hannibal’s throat, “is your heart racing now, Hannibal?”

Will’s claws are *very* sharp.

Hannibal swallows. “Yes.”

Will leans close. He brings his mouth to Hannibal’s ear, so close that Hannibal can feel the warmth of his breath against his skin. When Hannibal breathes, he tastes the strange salty tang of the sea on his tongue.

“I know,” Will whispers. “I can hear it. Feel it. It is the heartbeat of . . . prey.”

“Is that what we are to you? Prey?”

Will drags one sharp claw down Hannibal’s throat. He makes an affirmative noise. “Yes. Some might even call you an endangered delicacy. We aren’t allowed to take too many from

the surface world, you see. People might notice.”

“And how might a delicacy to your kind be served?”

Will laughs softly. “We have no need of your fancy banquets with your fine china and endless speeches. We tend to like our delicacies . . . raw. The acidity of fear is an excellent flavor on our tongue. Bright and sharp. Although . . . how was that you prepared the ortolans?”

“Gorged on grain and figs,” Hannibal answers, trying to keep his voice steady and his head still. “And then drowned while alive to marinate them. Then plucked and roasted.”

“Hmm. Well, we’ve certainly gorged, even if it is upon fare a little heavier than gain and figs. And I could drown you, you know.”

“I could well believe it,” Hannibal says, for Will’s hand has an iron grip around his neck. He has a slight temptation to test himself against Will’s strength, but the predator-instinct in him has grown still and silent, as if he knows he is outmatched, even though he did not know that there was another predator to match himself again until only a few moments ago. “You could also pluck me and roast me.”

Will draws back and wrinkles his nose. “Pluck you?”

“Surely you do not wish to get hair stuck in your teeth and stomach?” Hannibal ventures. But he realizes: “Unless . . . Unless you also consume your prey whole, bones and all.”

Will’s tail flicks. When Will smiles, Hannibal realizes that the movement must signal amusement, rather like how a cat might flick its tail. It is not exactly a promising sign, given that Will’s smile is not at all kind.

“I could eat you,” Will says in a considering voice. “Bones and all. My digestive system is much stronger than yours; your bones wouldn’t be difficult at all to swallow. And it would ensure that there would be no evidence left behind. You could join the ranks of the forever missing, Hannibal. Just like your own victims.”

“And if that is what you want, then I will go willingly. To nourish one such as you . . . It would be a glorious fate indeed.”

Will arches a haughty eyebrow. “Do you think it would matter to my stomach if you went willingly or not?”

“My meat would be less bitter,” Hannibal points out. “No fear.”

“My poison could render you dead faster than you could blink, much less have time to feel fear,” Will says dismissively. “And bitterness can add a nice flavor to the dish.”

“I’m afraid I’m not sure I can supply that flavor for you,” Hannibal says apologetically. He won’t deny that there is adrenaline pumping in his veins, brought on by the sudden realization that Will is not human and the fact that Will has sharp claws around his throat. But he cannot gaze upon Will – gloriously, beautifully, amazingly inhuman Will, with the

diamond at his throat and the scales upon his tail – and feel anything but awe. There is no room for fear.

“No, you’re too busy composing sonnets, I imagine,” Will says with a put-upon sigh. His hand loosens and he draws back. “Fortunately . . . I have a different appetite right now.”

Hannibal swallows his disappointment. “How may I assist?”

Will is not particularly talkative. He’s gotten better the longer he’s known Hannibal, and their conversations have gotten deeper, but he has still remained the concise man Hannibal had once met in Jack’s office – very brief and often rude and utterly to the point. Still, Hannibal is expecting an actual response of some kind.

He is not expecting Will to grin and then launch forward and sink his fangs into Hannibal’s shoulder.

The pain is sharp. Hannibal almost moans from it.

Also, his heartrate – already elevated – jumps significantly, and he can almost feel his adrenaline pumping.

“Your poison?” he manages to ask when Will releases him.

Will licks the blood off his fangs. He looks incredibly satisfied, as if tasting Hannibal’s blood was a finer meal than anything Hannibal has ever fed to him. It makes Hannibal want to offer to make him wine from his own blood. Or, hell, to bear his other shoulder and let Will drink him dry as is.

“A poison,” Will says. “A regular human could never keep pace with a mer during a spawning fever. We mate for days on end, over and over among the tides.”

Hannibal blinks. “A what?”

“Spawning fever. Your little ortolan concoction sent me into it. I shouldn’t have gone into it for another few moonfalls, but caviar . . . caviar is a potent ingredient. And since you got me into this mess,” Will says sweetly, “you’re going to get me out of it.”

Hannibal’s breath catches. The idea of not only being allowed to see Will, truly, but to participate . . .

His voice is, perhaps, a tad breathless when he says, “And how might I assist you?”

“Assist you,” Will mimics, his voice full of derision. “It’s spawning, Hannibal, not a business merger.”

“Will – ”

Will leans down and grabs at his groin. Considering that he still has his claws out, it’s a very effective means of silencing Hannibal. “Oh good, you’re receptive to my poison.”

“It’s you.”

“Flatterer. Not that it matters. So, then. Since you sent me into spawning fever, Hannibal, you’re going to help me ride it out. And how you’re going to do that is you’re going to carry me upstairs, and then you’re going to fill up that obscenely large bathtub you have, and then you and I – ” Will’s fangs flash as he grins “ – we are going to see just how long you can hold your breath.”

“You mean to drown me?”

“Only if you can’t keep up.”

Will’s tone is completely serious, as is his body language. Hannibal gets up and carefully pulls Will into his arms. He staggers for a moment, for Will is far heavier than he had anticipated. Not to mention that the tail is surprisingly difficult to get a grip on due to the scales.

But Hannibal has filleted many a fish in his lifetime, and the idea of being able to mate with Will is pleasing, so he gathers himself and begins struggling up the stairs.

“Maybe I should give you more poison,” Will says in a considering tone when Hannibal has to pause and pant and catch his breath at the top.

“If it – it pleases you,” Hannibal pants.

“Hmm. It does, actually.”

Which is how Hannibal earns himself a searing bite to his upper arm. Will’s fangs sink deep into his muscle, deep enough that Hannibal half worries about how he’ll be able to properly sterilize the wounds, but then the poison hits and his wildly beating heart is far more at the top of his concerns.

Somehow, he gets Will into the tub. Will sprawls there, as regal as a king even with no water, and does not lift a finger to help as Hannibal wheezes.

“I did say you were to fill up the tub,” Will says pointedly.

“Of – Of course. Hot or cold or warm – ?”

Will hums, his tail flicking aimlessly back and forth as he thinks. “I would prefer cold, like Mother Ocean . . . but you couldn’t take it. As cool as your frail human body can stand.”

Hannibal had once washed himself clean in the middle of a frigid stream in winter. And then when he’d taken up swimming to keep himself fit, he’d swam laps no matter the water temperature. He raises his chin and turns the tap on for cold.

“Your funeral,” Will says. “Now get in.”

The water is bracingly cold. His skin breaks out into goosebumps almost immediately. Hannibal takes a steadying breath and slowly, deliberately submerges himself.

“I did warn you,” Will says.

“I can handle it.”

“We’ll see if you’re still singing that tune in a week.”

Hannibal tries very hard not to think about how his skin, particularly his fingers, might look after a week of submersion. To distract himself, he turns his attention instead to looking at Will. Specifically, to Will’s long tail. It’s beautiful, there is no denying it, but it’s also rather outside Hannibal’s realm of sexual experience.

He licks his lips. “How do you want me?”

“As any dominant matriarch wants their spawning partner,” Will says, which tells Hannibal absolutely nothing.

“Am I meant to find out by trial and error?”

“Make an error and I’ll tear out your throat and sate my hunger instead. See me, Hannibal. You keep telling me I should. Now it’s your turn. See me.”

Hannibal takes a deep breath. He leans forward and looks, actually and properly looks, at the scales. They cover his entire lower half, gleaming purple and green and blue, and the transition from scale to flesh at Will’s waist is almost seamless. It’s like there’s a line that human eyes cannot see, and on one side there is warm flesh, on the other hard jewel-toned scales.

Yet even the flesh is different. The silver patterning on Will’s tail runs up his chest and through his entire body, even in the veins are lighter and harder to see against skin. Faint translucent webbing peeks out between his fingers; neat slits form gills on the sides of his neck.

And there is, of course, the diamond at his throat, but Hannibal has a strong feeling that going for that is definitely a mistake.

He focuses back on the tail. If mer are closer to fish than humans, then there must be a spot in Will’s tail where Hannibal is meant to attend to. He follows the patterns of silver, crisscrossing all over Will’s tail –

And sees one tiny spot where the silver veins do not run through.

Just one. It’s the same color as the scales that surround it, deep blue like the sea, and the silver veins surround it like a circle.

Hannibal reaches out a hand. Will cocks his head, an amused smirk playing at his fingers, and flicks those dangerous looking spines as though reminding Hannibal how quickly he could to his end. Hannibal dodges that playful flick and instead lets his hand come to rest on that small spot, and he finds that it is soft, for here the scales do not overlap as they do everywhere else on Will’s tail.

Will inhales sharply.

“I see you,” Hannibal says quietly. “Is this how you . . . spawn?”

“You see truly,” Will says, and the words bring a wave of relief to Hannibal.

Hannibal rubs at the spot, which is as soft as velvet and warm as the summer sun. Will’s tail goes limp under his ministrations. Will’s head falls back against the tub, a delicious sigh emanating from his lips. He appears absolutely and totally content.

But only for a moment.

Then he lifts his head again, and now his eyes blaze with hunger. Hannibal can recognize the hunger; he can feel it inside of him, spurred on by Will and only heightened by his potent poison, a heated fire in him that is roaring to escape its confines.

“I didn’t spare you so you could use your fingers,” Will says. “Get inside of me. Or else I’ll fill belly with you and seek someone else – someone who is stronger, better, more capable – to give me children instead.”

Hannibal doesn’t even realize he’s moving until he has a hand pushing Will against the tub. He says, “Do you think I would let another have you?”

If the way Will grins up at him is any indication, he does not take offense.

“My kind only take the strongest of mates. If you cannot sate my fever, I will find another. So, Hannibal,” Will says, fangs glittering in the light, “what shall it be? A little death . . . or a long dinner?”

In answer, Hannibal straddles that strange, beautiful tail. “You,” he pants as he thrusts inside, “are *mine*. I sent you into this fever; I alone shall sate it. And my seed alone will sire your children.”

“Only if you are strong enough. If not,” Will licks at his fangs, “then you’ll be dessert.”

“I would be – be honored. But not before – before I know that – that my flesh will nourish you and – and our child.”

“Already out of breath?” Will teases. “Now, now, that won’t do. . . You’ve a week left to go. Let me give you a hand, shall I?”

Will rears up and strikes. His fangs are sunk into the other side of Hannibal’s neck before Hannibal can even register that he’s moved. It’s a glorious pain, twice as painful as it was the last time, and Hannibal spares a moment to wonder deliriously if a human can die from an overdose of mer poison.

Then, of course, he comes, and he thinks of nothing at all, except Will and Will and *Will*.

Will keeps his word. Whenever Hannibal flags, he earns himself a new bite from Will's fangs, each more painful and stinging than the last, until his shoulders are more bite marks and bruises than skin. Will is also not shy about his claws, and so Hannibal gains many a scrape with those sharp tipped fingers.

He does not use the spines on his tail, but Hannibal has a sinking suspicion that is solely because that poison hidden there would kill him immediately.

Still, eventually there comes a time when even Will's bite is not enough to rouse Hannibal entirely. Oh, a part of him – the part Will wants – it rises to the occasion, but Hannibal's arms and legs feel rubbery and worn out and do not cooperate when he tries to move on.

Will hisses a laugh. "Is this the strength you promised me, Hannibal?"

"The spirit is willing," Hannibal tells him in between deep breaths. "The flesh, perhaps, is . . . not quite there yet."

"Our kind do not put stock in spirits," Will says. "When it is our time to fade, our bodies turn to seafoam and we return to Mother Ocean's embrace. We do not agonize over heaven and God as your kind does."

Hannibal lifts his chin. "Neither do I."

"And yet," Will says, tracing his neck with one sharp claw, "if God were to appear before you, would you beg Him for strength?"

The question is casual. Too casual. A test, then.

"The only being I will beg for strength is here already," Hannibal says. He bears his throat. "Bite me again, Will."

Delight sparks in Will's eyes. His tail swishes in the water, like the pleased motion of a cat. He leans in close to Hannibal's neck – and does not bite. Instead, he licks over one of his previous bites, still raw and bleeding sluggishly, and makes a soft sound.

"No, Hannibal. You cannot take another dose of the poison right now."

Hannibal sighs. It's a disappointing response, but he can't argue with it. His body feels on the verge of shock; so much adrenaline is taking its toll. But he can still offer Will something. "Then tear out my throat and feast upon my flesh."

To his surprise, Will laughs. "And end my fun now? No, I don't think so."

"But you said –"

"I'm not finished with you yet," Will whispers in his ear.

Those cold arms encircle him, and Will pulls him down. Hannibal tries to hold his breath, but the cold water that engulfs him is a shock; he reflexively loses his breath. When he inhales, though, Will is there to meet him in an all-consuming kiss.

A kiss that brings oxygen to Hannibal.

Hannibal opens his eyes in shock. The water is blood red after Will has torn his skin open so many times, but this he can see clearly: Will, pressed against him, tail twined around his legs, his gills flaring as he breathes against Hannibal – *for* Hannibal, into Hannibal.

It is a miracle greater than anything God could ever do.

Will presses his tail between Hannibal's legs and takes his pleasure, and Hannibal whines against those life-giving lips and lets him.

When it is over, Hannibal is overtired, overstimulated, and overwhelmed. He is also utterly and truly in love.

Will drains and refills the tub for them. Warm water, this time, although it feels like burning hot water to Hannibal's cold body. Will washes away the flecks of Hannibal's blood from his skin, and Hannibal mourns it, even if he understands.

"Will – " He has to clear his throat twice before the word is intelligible. "What now, Will?"

"Congratulations, Hannibal," Will says, scrubbing at his nails. "You have been gorged and drowned, and you've survived a spawning fever with a mer. Even I wasn't sure at the end if your heart would hold . . . but you surprised me."

"I could not disappoint my mate."

Will gives him a look. "Oh, we're not mates."

"But the spawning fever – "

"– is merely one stroke on the current to courtship. And my kind," Will says, pushing himself to his feet, "do not mate with lesser beings."

Hannibal stares at him. He has no idea when Will even transformed back. Yet the tail is gone now, leaving behind human legs. If he hadn't seen and felt the tail for himself, he would never have guessed that Will wasn't human.

Still: courtship. Hannibal can handle courtship. He'll do anything, if it gets him Will.

"How does one court a mer?"

"Carefully," Will says, with a sly little smile. He steps out of the tub, dodging Hannibal's hand with grace, and surveys him. "I'll let you live, Hannibal. This time. Speak of this to anyone, and the next time you touch water, no matter how small the amount, you'll drown."

Hannibal has been orgasming for a week straight. He should not at all be able to get hard. And yet – And yet he feels a stirring of arousal. He says, "I would never dream of betraying your confidentiality."

“See to it that you keep your word. Perhaps, when my spawning fever comes again, I’ll seek you out again. You might even still be alive.”

Hannibal grasps at the tub and struggles to pull himself upright. He’s as weak as starved waif; his arms shake and threaten to betray him. But he does get himself up, just in time to watch Will walk towards the door, seemingly complete unconcerned with the carnage he left behind.

“Wait! Wait, Will. Please.”

Will pauses.

“Did I,” Hannibal asks, and then he rephrases, “Did we . . . ”

Will cocks his head. “I guess I’ll find out in a few months,” is all he says. “Perhaps, if I feel kind, I’ll let you know.”

And then he is out the door and gone, like water receding after a tsunami. Here one moment; gone the next. Leaving behind nothing but battered limbs and bleeding wounds and water all over the floor.

Hannibal takes a deep breath. Lets it out. And prays to a new god.

Epilogue

Hannibal isn’t quite sure why he agrees to Anthony Dimmond’s invitation to meet him at the docks for a late night stroll. It’s clear Anthony finds him intriguing – or, at least, the *Dr. Fell* version of him – but Hannibal is rather less bewitched. Anthony is shallow, his smile too charming and his manipulations too obvious.

He is nothing compared to Will.

But Will, of course, is gone. He had walked out of Hannibal’s home and vanished into the night. His house had been sold; his dogs had been sent to a shelter; his resignation had been tendered. The only thing that had stopped Jack from charging Hannibal with murder had been the video surveillance at Quantico proving that Will had given his resignation in person, meaning it hadn’t been Hannibal whose company Will had last been in.

Not that it had mattered. With Will out of his reach, Hannibal had given into his worst impulses. He’d ended things with Alana. He’d left Jack choking on both his knowledge that he was right and his own blood. And Bedelia . . . well, she’d been useful to get Hannibal out of the country, but eventually even her careful, subtle, delicate prodding had been too much.

Perhaps that is who Anthony reminds Hannibal of. Someone whose senses are attuned just enough to peer through the stitching of his mask, but only just. And who thinks that peek gives them insight into the whole.

For Will, a peek would have been more than enough. Anthony is not Will.

He does look like Will, though. A little bit – in the curls of his hair, the color of his eyes, the frame of his face. Not exact, but enough that in low light and without speaking, it might be enough to fool someone. Maybe that is why Hannibal agreed to this spur of the moment offer. To get a taste, however small, of the life he had wanted with Will.

Anthony is not at their agreed upon meeting spot when Hannibal arrives, precisely on time. Nor is he there five minutes later, or ten minutes later.

Hannibal sighs. His patience with rudeness has only gotten shorter since he crossed the pond, and Anthony is being very rude indeed. Not to mention that Anthony's fate had already been shaky; now, it seems, Hannibal will have to cosign his body to the waves, as he did Bedelia.

A pattering of footsteps reaches Hannibal's ear. He turns, but a second later realizes that the sound is too small and slight for a man like Anthony. A few seconds later, his suspicions are proven correct when a little girl comes trotting up.

"Bonsoir!" she says brightly, all big eyes and pink cheeks.

Hannibal permits himself a small smile. "Bonsoir," he replies.

"Are you the doctor?"

"I could be. Although you don't look injured, little one."

The girl giggles. "I'm not hurt," she says, with the confidence only a small child can. "But Daddy said I would find the doctor here. Are you the doctor?"

Hannibal raises an eyebrow. He hadn't guessed that Anthony might bring a child, which certainly complicates things. Not enough to save Anthony, of course, but it might be enough to delay his death until Hannibal can get Anthony alone.

"Yes, I am," he says. He crouches down and smiles at her. "Are you going to bring me to him, little one?"

The girl puffs out her chest with pride. "Yes!" she says, enthusiasm clear in every line of her body. "Daddy said it was a job he could only entrust to me."

"Well," Hannibal says, holding out his hand, "then let's not keep him waiting, shall we?"

The girl seems delighted to be offered a hand. She grabs it with her small fingers and pulls him forward, barely giving him time to stand back up. She has a surprising amount of strength for a child, but then again, enthusiasm can often make up for the tenderness of youth. And Hannibal isn't actually trying to resist her.

She leads him down the docks, chattering on about her father in that bright child's voice. Hannibal hums and nods and lets her carry on, all the while noting where she is taking him.

Specifically, to a dark and secluded portion of the beach, where the streetlights are far and the waves are, while not overly loud, just enough to drown out most noise.

Perhaps Anthony might meet his fate here after all, if he's foolish enough to think he can ambush Hannibal.

Suddenly, Hannibal's hand is released. The girl squeals "Daddy!" loud enough to wake the dead and bolts, running full tilt for what Hannibal had thought was just a shadow. But the shadow is standing now, emerging from the waves until it resembles the form of a man, and that man catches the girl in his arms. He twirls her, unleashing a peal of delighted laughter, and then settles her on his waist.

The sight causes a sting in Hannibal's heart. The idea that Anthony might have this, while Hannibal is deprived . . .

"Bonsoir, Anthony," Hannibal calls out.

"Bonsoir," comes the answer from the waves.

It is *not* Anthony's voice.

Will emerges from the water, coming onto the beach where the moonlight can grace his face. And it is Will – those are his curls, those are his eyes, and that is the sly smile he'd given Hannibal before he had vanished and left Hannibal with a broken, bleeding heart. He is wearing clothes Hannibal does not recognize, although they are a welcome change from the over patterned plaid and ill-fitting suits, and his feet are bare upon the sand. He looks perfect.

"Will," Hannibal says, and it is all he can say.

"Hello, Hannibal," Will says. "Should I be worried that you thought I was someone else? Have you forgotten me so swiftly?"

"I – " Hannibal stutters. He'd forgotten – how could he have forgotten? – how easily Will could unbalance him. "My apologies, Will. I had met someone at a party, and they had wanted to speak to me afterwards. A passing acquaintance, no more."

Will hums. "Seems like a bit more than an acquaintance for you to agree to meet him in the dark by the dock."

" . . . It may have been reckless of me."

"Reckless?" Will bounces the little girl on his hip. "And what you did in America wasn't?"

Hannibal flushes. He looks down. It seems silly now, to confess that he'd detonated his own carefully cultivated person suit just because Will had left. And yet, he finds he cannot lie to Will, not even now, after being abandoned. He says, "You were gone. Vanished. No one could find you. I had . . . no more reason to stay."

Will raises an eyebrow. "Not for the opera?"

"Opera can be found on these shores as well."

"Not for your practice?"

“I have found other means of employment.”

“Your little game, then. Cat and mouse with Jack. Not even for that?”

“The only person who could see me – truly see me – had left the board. The game no longer had any interest for me. Leading the blind . . . it can only fill the well of amusement for so long.”

To his surprise, Will laughs at his answer. “You haven’t changed a bit,” he says, still snickering. “All pretty words and flowery analogies. No wonder Anthony was drawn to you.”

Hannibal blinks. “You know of Anthony?”

“But of course. A mer always knows another mer,” Will says, and before Hannibal can fully process that revelation, Will whistles a little song. The diamond at his throat comes to life, gleaming silver under the moonlight, and the sound of the water changes. No longer is it the gentle whoosh of the waves coming in and flowing out; no, now the water holds back and gathers itself up, like a riptide has formed.

And from the gathered water emerges a bound figure – Anthony. He is no longer the sly, charismatic creature that had attempted to manipulate Hannibal; now his clothes are torn, his hair is soaked, and he struggles and writhes around the water that holds him firmly.

“I found him waiting for you,” Will says, almost lazily, like the sheer power that he is displaying is nothing at all. “Fangs and claws at the ready. Did you know he wanted to eat you, Hannibal?”

“I had . . . guessed he wished to devour me. But I had thought it more of a . . . carnal sense.”

“Hmm, possibly. Orgasm is a particularly lovely flavor for a meal. Not that he’ll ever get the chance. I don’t take kindly to others trespassing upon what is *mine*.”

Hannibal’s breath catches. Will’s voice had sharpened at the last sentence, but the words . . .

“What?” Will asks. “Did you think you would be free of me that easily?”

“You did leave,” Hannibal points out, as delicately as he can.

“Well, of course I did,” Will says, hoisting the girl higher onto his waist. “My kind can’t spawn on land, Hannibal. We have to return to the deep for that. And I could not return until she was ready.” Will pauses and looks at the girl. He adds, “Say hello to your Papa.”

All of the air in the world disappears. Hannibal’s lungs freeze up; his heart stutters; his brain malfunctions. He can’t process it. He can’t process anything. His brain is stuck upon the repeating loop of *say hello to your papa say hello to your papa say hello to your papa*.

And then the little girl cheerfully says, “Hello, Papa!”

Just like that, Hannibal can breathe again. If only so that he can speak to Will’s – *their* daughter.

“Hello, little one,” Hannibal says, and it takes every ounce of his strength to keep his voice from cracking. “I’ve waited so long to meet you. What’s your name?”

“Kalypso. I’ve been waiting to meet you too! But I had to get strong enough to walk using human legs,” she tells him, swinging her little legs around wildly, “so Daddy said I had to be patient. Walking is *weird*, Papa. How do you do it all the time?”

“I’ve never known anything different,” Hannibal confesses.

“Well, swimming is better,” Kalypso informs him confidently, in the way only children can. She looks at Will. “You’re going to teach Papa how to swim like us, aren’t you, Daddy?”

“Soon, my little jellyfish, soon,” Will says, smoothing a hand down her hair.

“Kalypso,” Hannibal murmurs, tasting the name. It rolls beautifully off his tongue. “*She who conceals*. Ruler of Ogygia. She who promised Odysseus immortality, and trapped him for seven years when he did not want it.”

Will rolls his eyes. “Should have known you couldn’t resist the lecture,” he says, but his voice is fond. “Although our version of the story sounds a little different than yours. Odysseus liked to embellish. And he had a wife on whose good side he wanted to stay.”

“I would love to hear it,” Hannibal says honestly. “Although I am glad you did not wait seven years.”

“Our children grow much faster than yours do. I had no need to wait for seven when Kalypso was ready now.”

“So . . . you will take me with you?”

“I didn’t spend all this time *just* swimming about and raising Kalypso, you know,” Will says. “I sought out a sea witch. It took some – convincing, but eventually they told me about an old story. The myth of transformation. If you are strong enough – ”

“I am.”

“ – then we can ask Mother Ocean to receive you and make you like me. I just needed one tiny, little hard to come by ingredient.”

“Which was?” Hannibal asks, already calculating the various stashes of money he has and how they might best be spent to acquire whatever Will needs. Because he will find it – he’ll burn the whole world, if he must, to find what he needs to be with Will and Kalypso.

Will smirks. He turns and points at Anthony. “The raw, beating heart of a mer,” he announces.

Anthony’s struggles increase remarkably. Unfortunately, they are also useless.

“I must eat his heart?”

“Yes. Raw.” Will tilts his head, a sly gleam in his eyes. “You’re not going to get squeamish on me now, are you, Hannibal? Dr. Bones-And-All?”

“For you, Will,” Hannibal says lowly, “I would consume all of him, bones and all.”

“Sap,” Will says, but the flush in his cheeks betrays his pleasure at Hannibal’s words. “Fortunately, you won’t have to do that. Just his heart will do.”

Will hums, a brief melody that is like nothing Hannibal has ever heard. The ocean, however, seems to know it, for the water sways and moves to Will’s tune, enclosing Anthony and bringing him closer. It pins him to the sand of the shallows, like a fish trapped by a net.

“Bonsoir, Anthony,” Hannibal says politely.

Anthony’s eyes flick to him. They are full of rage; Hannibal has the impression that if he wasn’t bound and gagged by the water, he’d be saying all manner of quite rude things. Which is probably why Will isn’t letting him speak.

No sense in allowing him to taint their daughter’s tender ears, after all.

Will’s melody changes. He whistles, three shrill and sharp notes. The water changes too; three spears of glittering ice arise under the moonlight, and at Will’s gesture, they launch themselves forward, burying deep into Anthony’s flesh, perfectly arrayed around his heart like three frozen swords.

Anthony’s face contorts into a wordless scream. His throat glitters too, but faintly, like a light spluttering at the end of its battery. Hannibal peers at him and sees a diamond there, like Will’s, but smaller and fainter.

“His Song,” Will explains.

“It looks like yours.”

“All mer have them. It is the source of our power. Anthony and I have the Song of water, which allows us to command the waves and the tide and the sea.”

“His Song doesn’t seem to be doing him much good,” Hannibal comments.

“Well, of course not. I’m much stronger than he is. He’s spent too much time on land, so he has forgotten how mer do battle. I would be surprised if he could summon so much as a droplet right now. But that doesn’t really matter; he is still a mer, and his heart is still a mer’s heart, and so it is all we need. Eat his heart, Hannibal, and join me and our daughter in Mother Ocean’s embrace.”

There is nothing Hannibal would want more, so he steps forward and wades into the shallows. The water is bitterly cold, but he endured a week of freezing water whilst Will milked him dry of seed; this is nothing. And a mer’s chest, he finds, is not so different from a human’s when it comes to prying it open and exposing the heart, especially since Will thoughtfully stabbed it open for him.

Although: “Will you be observing,” Hannibal asks of Will, “or participating?”

“Observing.”

“It seems . . . rude. To not let you and Kalypso join me.”

Kalypso lights up at that, making grabby hands at him, but Will shakes his head. “No, we can only observe this time. You must do this on your own. And,” he adds, when he sees Hannibal gearing up to protest, “the whole heart is needed for the ritual to work.”

Hannibal sighs in regret, but he cannot argue with that. What he can do, though, is offer, “Next time, then?”

Will smiles. “Next time.”

With that promise secured, Hannibal turns his attention to Anthony’s heart. It’s not too dissimilar from a human’s, except that it is perhaps a tad bigger and a shade different in color. He prizes it free from Anthony’s chest, taking pains to get every single bit of it even as Anthony writhes, and raises it to his mouth.

It tastes like salt. Salt and brandy and just the faintest hint of caviar.

By the time Hannibal has chewed and swallowed the last bite, the light has long since left Anthony’s eyes. The light has left the Song at his throat too; now it looks like nothing more than a dull stone.

“It is done,” Will says. “Mother Ocean, may you receive Hannibal Lecter as one of your own and grant him as my mate.”

There is no answer Hannibal hears. No heavenly choir; no vibration through the waves. But a wave rises up, large enough to engulf Anthony – when it touches his body, his Song crumbles to nothingness and his tail withers. When the wave retreats, only half of a man is left.

Will sighs. “Well, that’s a good sign,” he says. “Let’s find out if Mother Ocean granted my prayer.”

“That wasn’t the answer?”

“No, Mother Ocean claims all of her children when they die. He’ll turn to sea foam soon enough.”

“Then how will we – ”

“We will swim,” Will answers, “and if you can swim with us, then you will have officially left Mother Earth behind and received the blessing of Mother Ocean.”

“And if not?”

“Then you’ll get your other wish, Hannibal,” Will says, wading into the waters with Kalypso in his arms. “You’ll drown at my hands.”

And, well. It's not like Hannibal has anything left to lose.

Hannibal follows Will and Kalypso into the water. It's still cold, for his breath steams in the air, but thankfully his body has acclimated, so he is able to mirror Will and peel the clothes from his body without difficulty. As he sheds his shirt, Kalypso glides around him, like a dolphin that flashes in and out of the waves, already in her mer form and entirely comfortable in it.

"She's beautiful, isn't she?" Will asks softly.

"Yes," Hannibal answers. "Does she have the Song of water too?"

"Songs don't work that way. Hers will develop when she is older. It might be of water – that is the most common Song – but it might not. We used to have so many Songs: of earthquakes, of volcanos, of storms. We'll just have to wait and see."

"But I don't want to wait, Daddy," Kalypso pouts.

"I'm afraid that isn't really my call," Will tells her in amusement, tickling her stomach as she floats by. "When you're older, my little jellyfish."

"I'm older now."

"Older and bigger," Will amends. He looks at Hannibal. "Are you ready?"

"If I am not, then may you and Kalypso feast well tonight."

"So dramatic," Will says. "You really haven't changed at all. Come on, Kalypso, let's show Papa how to swim home!"

Kalypso takes to that challenge with unbridled glee. A flick of her tail, and she is off like a shot, almost faster than the eye can see – or, at least, faster than Hannibal's eyes can. Will seems to have no difficulty, for he dives beneath the water without hesitation.

And Hannibal – Hannibal takes a deep breath and follows.

The water is cold and dark. Hannibal thanks all of his years of swimming laps, for that is the only reason he manages to follow the gleaming silver outline of Will as they descend deeper and deeper. Yet nothing happens – no gills, no webbing, and no tail. Anthony's heart sits heavily in his stomach, but it feels like nothing more than a last meal.

The world begins to gray, and then fuzzy. Hannibal's lungs begin to cry for air. His eyes burn from the salt.

Eventually, he can't stop it. His body's reflexes kick in: his mouth opens, and he inhales, and his lungs fill with water instead of air.

He blacks out, and the last thing he sees is Will's tail, silver and blue, flickering in the distance.

To Hannibal's great surprise, he wakes up.

"Hello, Hannibal."

"Will," Hannibal says, but the word sounds different. Odd and echoing. Like it's underwater.

Actually. Not like. Exactly as sound is underwater.

Hannibal blinks, sits up, and the world comes into focus. The *watery* world, that is, for Hannibal is resting on a bed of seaweed and shells are scattered about the floor and the wall is lined with lichen.

Will is smiling broadly when Hannibal looks at him. "Welcome to my world," he says. "You are of Mother Ocean now, as I am. As Kalypso is. And you have left behind Mother Earth forever."

"Will I not be able to wear human legs, as you do?"

"In time and with practice, yes. But you'll still be a mer, whether you move with legs or a tail. You'll still have water in your lungs, and seam foam in your veins, and," he says, with a mischievous look in his eyes, "a Song in your throat."

Hannibal's hand flies to his neck. Just as Will had proclaimed, he can feel a hard mass at the base of his throat, in the exact same place as Will's Song.

"What color is it?"

"Red. Like your tail."

Which is when Hannibal looks down and sees that, yes, he does have a tail, and it is indeed red. Red as blood, in fact.

"I should have guessed, really," Will continues. "There could be no more fitting Song for you than temptation."

"Temptation?"

"Yes. Odysseus met a few in his travels; I believe he called them sirens. Your Song gives you influence over the mind, and bewitchment of the ear, and power over the heart. A rare thing. Most of our kind with that Song have long since died out."

"Influence over the mind," Hannibal says. "Hmm. Will it work on you?"

"Not if you want to stay in one piece," Will says. He bears his fangs. "And not on Kalypso, either."

"You have my word."

Will looks at him for a long moment, peering right down into his soul. Hannibal lets him; he has no intention of ever endangering their beloved child.

Eventually, Will nods seemingly satisfied, and tells Hannibal, “Your Song can affect anyone, whether they are of Mother Earth or Mother Ocean. Supposedly it could even affect the children of Mother Sky, but no mer alive has ever known them in anything but half-remembered legends.”

“A lovely gift. I must give thanks to Mother Ocean.”

“I can show you how the proper way. But later.”

“Later? Why, do you have something planned?” Hannibal asks coyly, tangling their tails together and enjoying the sight of his red scales against Will’s blue. “Not that I object, of course.”

“Insatiable,” Will laughs. “But it is not I who would object. Kalypso wants to show you all of her favorite spots.”

“Ah. I see. I suppose I can wait. A little bit.”

Will gives him a warning look. “Kalypso comes first, Hannibal. I mean it. Do anything to her, and I’ll Sing up a storm you can’t escape and decorate the altar of Mother Ocean with your bones.”

“You have my word,” Hannibal repeats solemnly. “I will not harm Kalypso, nor any other children you might bear.”

Will is halfway through relaxing when the second half of his sentence registers. He rears up, amusement on his face and fire in his eyes, and says, “You’re so *very* arrogant and presumptuous, you know that? Get out of here and go find Kalypso before I bite you and leave you paralyzed for a moonfall.”

“As you command, my love.”

“Oh, shut up.”

“But first: may I beg a kiss?”

Will heaves a very exaggerated and aggrieved sigh. But he doesn’t stop Hannibal from winding their tails together, or pressing him into a wall, or kissing him. And kissing underwater, Hannibal finds, is not so terribly different than kissing on land. Even if it is all the sweeter now that they are on even footing.

“Daddyyyyyyyyy,” comes Kalypso’s voice. “You said I could show Papa all of my favorite spots!”

Will pulls away, laughing. “Well, you heard our daughter. Get swimming, Hannibal.”

“Yes, I heard our daughter,” Hannibal says, and he cannot quite stifle the delight that wells up within him. He has Will and he has Kalypso, a mate and a daughter. It’s far different than anything he could have imagined – and yet it is infinitely better than he could have ever

imagined. He turns his head and calls, “I was trying to be polite and give you a head start, you know. But since you don’t want it . . .”

A squeal of laughter is his answer, followed by the sound of Kalypso rapidly swimming away.

“You may regret that,” Will says. “She’s very fast.”

“I’ll find her.”

“I know.” Will kisses him again. “Happy hunting, Hannibal.”

Hannibal releases him and swims to the entrance. When he reaches it, he finds a glorious sight in front of him: the entire ocean, lit up before him in ways he knows no human eyes could ever see, much less comprehend.

It’s beautiful.

“Ready or not, Kalypso,” he calls, “here I come!”

FINIS

End Notes

A/N: Hannibal and Will raise Kalypso together under the sea. Will teaches her the way of the mer and how to hunt beneath the waves; Hannibal teaches her about the surface world and how to hunt on land. They eventually return to land once Kalypso is old enough to hold her human form and Hannibal is so very proud when she has her first successful hunt. He also buys some more caviar and ortolans because, well. Why not.

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